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**Dorota Ostrowska**

**“The migrant gaze” and “the migrant festive chronotope”**

**- programming the refugee crisis at the European human rights and documentary film festivals.  
The case of the One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival (2016).**

**Setting up the Scene: 2015**

The summer of 2015 was a watershed for Europe in terms of the migrant and refugee crisis with the images of anonymous crowds pouring across European borders reported daily on all news channels (Georgiou & Zaborowski 2017). These images found their apogee in the photograph of a Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, washed out on the beach of Lesbos. The news reporting of the refugee crisis positioned the TV viewers ‘at worst [as] indifferent listeners of distant suffering, and at best, potential activists, subtly encouraged to relate to the cause of suffering’ (Chouliaraki 2006, 12). This by and large a politically disabling spectacle of suffering unravelling on European TV screens is what Chouliaraki called a “crisis of pity” (12). Such representations of the migrant crisis were by no means new as the images of the boats filled with, mostly African immigrants, trying to cross the Mediterranean had already been a familiar sight to European TV spectators. As Jørholt pointed out in relation to these earlier representations of immigration to Europe: “if these image are sure to shock most spectators, at least initially, it is doubtful that they will elicit any true understanding of what is at stake for the Africans who choose to set out on these journeys” (2019, 281). Such understanding could not have been formulated based on images broadcast on TV during the 2015 migrant crisis while the intensity of the coverage shocked, overwhelmed and numbed the European spectators. There was a need to develop a different imaginary and intellectual framework to engage and respond to the migrant crisis and to the way it was being defined on TV screens.

It was a selected number of human rights and documentary film festivals in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Sweden which managed to offer a different type of imaginary through their programming choices in 2015, 2016 and 2017. These film festivals were: One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival (Prague, Czech Republic) with a thematic section “Looking for Home” in 2016 which had another edition in 2017 under the title: “Dreams of Europe”; Verzió International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival (Budapest, Hungary) which had a special section in 2015 entitled “Screening the Refugee Crisis” and continued with a similar focus during its 2016 edition in a section entitled “On the Move: Alienation”; finally, in 2016 Tempo Documentary Film Festival (Sweden) had a section of short films inspired by the refugee crisis called “Short Film Collective”.

The focus of the Prague and Budapest film festivals, on the themes of home and journey respectively, chimes with some of the main themes which are identified in the cinema focused on the subject of migration to Europe. The theme of journeying to Europe is as present as that of the destination – the point of arrival, or the point of departure – both representing different notions of home and belonging and the dynamics present between insiders and outsiders.<sup>1</sup> For this reason to understand fully what the “migrant festival chronotope” is, the category proposed in this article as the lens to articulate the impact of the human rights film festival in relation to the migrant crisis, it would be necessary to consider both types of themes, journeying and home, as they are recast in the programmes of each of the festivals. Due to space limitations and the complexity of the topic I will only be able focus on the Czech’s One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival<sup>2</sup> in full knowledge that this article will give incomplete insight to various aspects of the migrant festive chronotope. Importantly, the theme of home evoked in the festival’s special section resonates with some theoretical and psychoanalytic aspects of the migrant gaze and the migrant festive chronotope which are developed in this article and is another reason to focus on this film festival here. In contrast the thematic focus of Verzió International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival was more directly concerned with the issues of journey and movement as opposed to that of home. In 2015 a special section of the festival, “Screening the Refugee Crisis”, focused on the migrant crisis was introduced in the following way: “2015 will enter history books as a key year in international migration – and as a year of irresponsible words. Some people envision a great migration of the scale of the Huns, the Goths or the “conquering” Hungarian tribes ignoring the fact that today’s refugees and other migrants do not have any military or political goals”. In 2016 the festival continued with the theme of movement in order to engage further with the implication of the increase migration to Europe and presented the special section “On the Move: Alienation”.

Documentary films programmed at these two human rights and documentary film festivals shared some of the characteristics of the films about African migration which Jørholt described as “journey films”. She argues that while they present a more individualized and dignified portrayal of the migrants the films do that from the European point of view as they are authored by European film-makers (282). Jørholt uses her critique of European documentaries about African migrants to focus her discussion on films on migration made by African film-makers who understood that ‘the othering process inherent in the very concept of “understanding the pain of other” should not be ignored’ (284). Film festival programming offers another way to question and to counter this process of othering in the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to her book *Immigration Cinema in the New Europe* Isolina Ballesteros presents one of the most comprehensive overviews of the existing literature on cinema engaged with the themes of migration.

<sup>2</sup> “One World Film Festival” from now on.

European documentaries made on the subject of migration. The way in which these films are selected, sequenced and brought into dialogue with each other as part of a film festival programme allows for a different kind of reception of the films by the audiences. Their response is not about “othering” the “pain of the others”. Instead it is about creating a possibility of an empathic and politicized response on the part of the audiences which grows out of their deeper understanding of the plight of the migrants.

### **One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival**

The One World Film Festival was founded in 1999. Since its origins it has been part of People in Need<sup>3</sup> which was ‘a Czech relief organization dedicated to human rights advocacy’ (Blaževic, 2012, 109)<sup>4</sup>. As the refugee crisis was unfolding in 2015 the response of the Czech public was as negative as that in Hungary and other Central and Eastern European countries marked by strong anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric. People in Need and other NGOs intervention crystallized around the focus on the conditions in which refugees found themselves in detention centres located on the Czech territory which were part of the ongoing discussion regarding refugees. The centres were important not just in terms of the material existence of the refugees but because they were ‘an embodiment of asylum and immigration policies’ (Szczepanikova, 2013, 130). Furthermore, Czech volunteers, referred to as the “Czech team”, were among the most active in the efforts to assist the refugees along the so-called “Balkan route” which ran through the Czech Republic (The Czech Republic: Migration trends and political dynamics 2016). The themed programmes of the One World Film Festival in 2016 and 2017 must therefore be seen in the context of the events surrounding the refugee crisis in 2015 and the Czech response to it.

Through their special thematic sections, “Looking for Home” and “Dreams of Europe”, the festival made its task to investigate the refugee crisis as the event reshaping not just the Czech but European societies. This led to the festival’s desire to interrogate, as they put it in their opening statements, the fundamental notions of “home” and “European identity”. The Open World Film Festival in 2016 was introduced in the following way:

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<sup>3</sup> According to DEMAS, an umbrella organization for Czech NGOs supporting democratization, civil society and human rights globally, People in Need (PIN) ‘focuses on relief aid, development cooperation and support of human rights and democratic freedom. In the Czech Republic, People in Need implements social integration programs and provides informative and educational activities. Established in 1992 by Czech journalists and former dissidents, PIN is today one of the largest organizations of its kind in post-communist Europe and has implemented projects in forty countries over the past twenty years’ (DEMAS).

<sup>4</sup> By deciding to include a film festival as part of their outreach and advocacy programme People in Need followed the paths of other human rights NGOs such Human Rights Watch which runs an extensive network of annual film festivals focussed on human rights issues. The main difference between the People in Need initiative and Human Rights Watch was People in Need origins in Central Europe and its links to the struggle for human rights associated with the anti-communist dissidents such as Václav Havel.

The ongoing events have forced us to think about what home means to us, what part of it we are willing to share, and what part on the contrary, we intend to keep for ourselves. Often we take home for granted and only beginning to pay attention to it when we lose it. The migrant crisis has revealed a lot, especially about us. Home is a set of values that is hard to depict (“One World 2016. Final Report”).

The fact that the festival’s organizers were concerned not only with the Czech but more broadly European notion of home is related to two issues. Firstly, the Czech audiences are European ones not just in cultural and historical sense but also through the Czech membership of the European Union. Secondly, the One World Film festival is unique in that a selection of its programme is also screened in Brussels. These screenings are seen as a way to impact debates about human rights happening in Brussels among the Eurocrats. On the festival website we read: ‘every year the selection of films screened in Prague is also brought to Brussels, where we present human rights themes to politicians and government officials’ (One World International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival). For these reasons the notion of home should be understood here as both specifically Czech and more generally – European. The notion of home is also a unique way to understand space in relation to a film festival event – which I argue – is a critical feature of the migrant festive chronotope.

The hyphenated self-definition of the organisers of the One World Film Festival and its audiences as both Czech and European brings to mind Thomas Elsaesser’s idea of “double-occupancy” which means that ‘our identities are multiply defined, multiply experienced, and can be multiply assigned to us, at every point of our lives (...) to the point where the very notion of national identity will be replaced by other kinds of belonging, relating and being’ (109). Being both Czech and European represents one of the examples of this new kind of belonging and evokes the idea of Europe of many. Yet, the notion of shared European “home” has also far less positive connotations when considered in the context of the political discourse about “Fortress Europe”. Ironically, this fortress until quite recently used to be as inaccessible to the Czechs as it is nowadays to non-European migrants. The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004 dramatically altered the way in which the Czechs are positioned in regard to the “Fortress Europe”. These complexities need to be kept in mind when thinking about the profile of the Czech programmers and Czech audiences of the One World Film Festival as they will contribute to some of tensions present in the concept of the migrant festive chronotope. What is the impact of achieving the state of “double-occupancy” in regard to one’s identity by becoming part of the Fortress of Europe rather than through defying it? One way to answer

this question is to explore the importance of the discourses of the human rights in relation to the work of this particular film festival in the Czech context.

The Czechoslovak dissident movement headed by Václav Havel crystallised around the Karta 77 (Charter 77) in the aftermath of the events of the Prague Spring in 1968 when the focus on 'human rights emerged as a minimalist, hardy utopia that could survive in a harsh [political] climate' (Moyn 2010, 121; Havel 1992; Bolton 2012). The efforts to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia ended with the invasion of Prague by the Warsaw Pact troops headed by the Soviet Union in August 1968. A few years later, at the beginning of 1977, a group of opposition activists signed a document demanding freedom for the members of an underground psychedelic rock band Plastic People of the Universe. The 241 signatories of the document Charter 77 formed a loose community of dissidents which demanded from the Czechoslovak government to observe human rights (Bolton 15). Human rights discourse championed by the Charter 77 'filled the space left vacant by the implosion of reformed communism [where] dissidence worked by leaving behind political alternative in the name of moral criticism' (136). The signatories of the Charter 77 argued that 'the first premise of moral dissident was the recognition that ordinary politics were not viable' and a new form of politics needed to be developed (162). There has always been a globalised and unifying dimension to the concept of human rights embraced by the dissidents as they shared Havel's conviction that both socialism and capitalism had the same basic problems. As Moyn points 'Havel went so far as to say that dissent mattered not through inspiration from but as warning to the West, where the moral nightmare seemed far worse than in the East, where the totalitarian system made control visible' (163). Ultimately, Havel believed human dignity couldn't be guaranteed in the traditional democracies because they 'could offer no fundamental opposition to the automatism of technological civilisation' (163).

When Václav Havel and other dissidents came to power after 1989, they drew on their dissident experience and 'life-long struggle for human rights and civil liberties in the Charter 77' in defining the role of Czechoslovakia on the international stage (Wallat 2001/2, 15). They wanted to create a "morally sound policy dominated by the fight for truth and human rights in the Charter 77 tradition (15). This desire for Czechoslovakia to play such role on the international stage came to the end in 1990/1. The 1993 dissolution of the Czechoslovak state into the Czech Republic and Slovakia was fast approaching and the international context was changing due to the Soviet Union's discontent over the disappearance of its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. The Yugoslavian conflict erupted at the Czechoslovak doorstep brining up various tensions in the country's politics (18-19). With the influence of the dissidents focused on the human right waning it is not surprising that their internationalising mission needed to be carried out by a new advocacy organisation. People in Need was formed as early as 1992 by 'dissidents and leaders of the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution (who)

teamed up with conflict journalists' (Blažević 120). As the importance of human rights was removed from the centre of the Czech foreign policy the Czech Republic's 'reputation as a nation active on the international stage in promoting human rights and democracy worldwide' was still proclaimed by the One World Film Festival director, Blažević, in 2012. In the last two decades the NGO, People in Need, and its cultural arm, the One World Film Festival, continued to be Czech beacons of human rights while 'contributing to shaping the public opinion within the Czech Republic and its foreign policy' (Blažević 110). At the same time the public opinion was growing more hostile towards one of the main areas of human rights – foreign immigration to the Czech Republic. The programmers of the One World Film Festival saw themselves as heirs of a certain now globalised conception of human rights, which was supportive of immigration, and which had been associated with the Czechoslovak dissidents under communism. Nowadays this tradition is much more strongly expressed in the context of the EU political discourses than the Czech one. It is this expansive and rich tradition of human rights discourse which allows for the audiences and the programmers of the One World Film Festival to be both Czech and European which is at the core of Elsaesser's concept of double-occupancy, and treat the issue of migration as both Czech and European.

The One World Film Festival is both a human rights and a documentary film festival. Whilst documentary film festivals have been discussed quite extensively in literature (Nornes 2011; Russell 2015; Davies 2016; Vallejo 2017; Winston & Turnin 2017; Moine 2018), human rights ones are less thoroughly covered (Iordanova & Torchin 2012; Tascòn 2015; Tascòn & Wils 2017). Among writings on human rights film festivals Sonia Tascòn's contribution stands out in providing a thoroughly developed theoretical frameworks to understand this type of film festivals based on her research of Latin American human rights film festivals (2015). Tascòn created the concept defining the hierarchies at this type of a film festival – "the humanitarian gaze" (2015). The "humanitarian gaze" helps understand the dynamics between films screened at human rights film festivals and the audiences of these festivals. The refugee and migrant crisis which provided the context to the One World Film Festival programming in 2016 and 2017 transformed the notion of the humanitarian gaze into what I call the "migrant gaze" offering agency to the refugees portrayed on screen. It was the unique application of the idea of home, which allowed for this transformation to take place. The migrant gaze which emerged as a result was both more individualized and personal than the humanitarian gaze. The migrant gaze was enhanced by the migrant voice normally inaudible in the TV broadcasts. As a result the audiences could not so much as to identify with the migrants through their gaze and voice but to dialogue with them. It was women taking care of the refugees (social workers) who offered the most direct and definite point of identification for the film festival audiences. The idea of "home" was also instrumental in allowing us to

designate festivals such as One World as an example of a migrant festive chronotope within which an alternative set of values and attitudes towards the refugees could be presented and enacted.

A migrant festive chronotope is established in the zone of crisis for the audiences, the programmers and importantly also for those whose lives are represented on screen, in this case the refugees. The decision to programme such films as the crisis is ongoing postulates the space of the festival as a safe heaven, a kind of a home, for the audiences and those migrants whose lives are shown in the films. A dialogue of some kind can be established as a result, an opening created between the two. The transformation of the humanitarian gaze into the migrant one is about a process of identification of the audiences with the migrants' plight and in taking a stand in the anti-immigration debate. This new point of identification for the audiences as well as the agency granted to the migrants through the simple act of representing them as living, breathing and talking individuals is an indication of some modest political or social change a film festival may be able to achieve and shape. The possibility of some social change in the context of a film festival programming is a key characteristic of the "migrant festive chronotope".

My argument will proceed in four parts. I will first discuss briefly the notion of the festive chronotope. Then drawing on D. W. Winnicott and Annette Kuhn, I will show how the notion of home represented on screen and also expressed through the film festival programming allowed for the migrant festive chronotope to emerge. Next, I will introduce Tascò's notion of the humanitarian gaze in more detail and show how in the context of the festival it becomes a migrant gaze within the migrant festive chronotope. I will conclude with brief analysis of the One World festival's special section "Looking for home" from 2016.

### **Migrant festive chronotope**

The most thorough exposition of the idea of a chronotope may be found in Bakhtin's piece entitled "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. Notes towards a Historical Poetic" published in 1937-1938 and amended in 1973 (Bakhtin 1981). This is how Bakhtin defines a chronotope there:

[chronotope is an] intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. (...)In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole (84).

Most of the time in his discussion of literary chronotopes Bakhtin privileges time over space even though he saw the two as interconnected and joined at the hip. In these types of chronotopes he says

that 'time, as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space, becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history' (84). But there are also other kinds of chronotopes which foreground the spatial dimension instead of the temporal ones. The spaces which are particularly productive in regards to chronotopes and literary narratives which contain them are: the road, the castle, the parlors and salons, the provincial town and importantly for us - the threshold. For Bakhtin the chronotope of threshold is one of the spatially oriented chronotopes where emphasis are put on liminal and marginal spaces such as thresholds, stairways, landings and foyers. These spaces of passage are also points where 'a crisis, radical change or an unexpected turn of fate take place, where decisions are made, where the forbidden line is overstepped, where one is renewed or perishes' (169). The time of such dramatic rupture or transformation is not epic or biographical time, rather time is what Bakhtin calls "crisis time" where 'a moment is equal to years and decades' (169). In other words the moment of change is so significant that 'it is equal to a "billion years"' and for this reason it is 'when the moment loses its temporal restrictiveness' (149). Space in turn becomes the key element of the experience of this particular chronotope.

Bakhtin developed the idea of a chronotope of a threshold in relation to Dostoevsky's novels. He argued that much of the turning points in his writing happened on a threshold between private and public spaces. Furthermore he observed that private spaces in Dostoevsky's novels are never really private - with the doors never properly shut and people wandering in and out. He also argued that the thresholds or other kinds of liminal spaces are chronotopes because this is where the most dramatic transformations of the character's life happen. We could extrapolate from Bakhtin's argument that a film screening at a film festival is very much like a threshold of which Bakhtin wrote in regard to the chronotope of threshold. This is where the time is contracted to the time of the film narrative and this is the moment when a potential moment of crisis, epiphany or resurrection might be experienced by a viewing public. Sitting in front of a screen in a dark auditorium is the threshold in the consciousness of any viewer.

The fact that a festive chronotope is modelled on the Bakhtinian chronotope of the threshold is intensified in the context of the human rights film festivals such as One World in the Czech Republic. This festival takes place in a transitional space through which the migrants pass but in which they don't settle. The festival itself is that kind of a threshold established in turn in the space of transit and passage which is that of the Czech territory. In the context of the refugee crisis this film festival becomes a privileged space – a special kind of home – created by the interaction of programmers, films and audiences. Human rights film festivals as a home is also an expression of a migrant festive chronotope which impacts the experience of the audiences and their understanding of the plight of the migrants and of their own plight as well. This special notion of home will be explored through the lens of

D.W. Winnicott's idea of cultural experience, home and transitional object which most recently have been productively revisited by Annette Kuhn in *Little Madnesess: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena & Cultural Experience* (2013b).

### **Festival event as a home**

W. D. Winnicott was one of the most influential British psychoanalysts. Winnicott's theory of cultural experience is rooted in the relationship between the mother and the baby (Winnicott 1986). What's essential to the baby's growth and development is a process of separation and individuation which involves a creation of a third space, a space of play or a transition space, which is not a mental or psychic space, and not a space of objects, completely separated from a baby. Rather it is a space in between where real objects are re-created and reinvented by the baby. Importantly, this space of play and of transitional objects is not just confined to infancy and childhood but extends through the adult life of an individual becoming a sphere of art, politics, or fandom - and other little pleasures. As Kuhn and others demonstrated cinema (and audiovisual media) being part and parcel of the cultural experience can be also considered in the context of Winnicott's space of play. What's at the heart Winnicott's thinking is the idea of home which he refers to as a holding place. In fact one of the most famous expressions associated with Winnicott is "home is where we start from". It is the mother who provides the first experience of home, a safe holding place, which then the child recreates in the adulthood through a range of cultural experiences. At the heart of Winnicott's idea of home is a transitional object - something which exists but also something that the child creates in its mind.

Annette Kuhn has been exploring the implications of Winnicott's ideas in regard to cultural experience of cinema and other media (2013a). She argues that 'he [Winnicott] undertook the work of setting out the psychodynamic and environmental foundations of cultural experience, opening the way for explorations of how cultural experience works in practice' (161). Kuhn analyses different ways in which the audiences engage with moving image installations in a gallery space. In her exploration of the gallery space Kuhn evokes a notion of a frame which she sees as a 'boundary that contains something, and this something is qualitatively different from what is excluded, what is outside the frame. Just as the frame separates two kinds of reality, so the frame belongs in, is part of, each reality - it is liminal' (162). She argues that 'in Winnicott's terms, the holding or facilitating environment would be a frame, a setting that permits the infant's or the adult's confident exploration of the new, the unfamiliar' (163).

In order to explore in more detail how the Winnicottian frame opens and illuminates our understanding of the One World Human Rights Film Festival in 2016 it is useful to draw on Kuhn's view

of four distinct frames within a gallery which is her main example of the environment which facilitates a cultural experience. These four frames are: topographical/institutional, the architecture of the building, 'framed gap' within the gallery to display a work of art, and 'the frame constituted by the form and medium of the artwork itself' (163). It is the first type – topographical or institutional frame – which is particularly helpful in my discussion of the One World Film Festival.

Just like a gallery the film festival is an institution, which on regular intervals, usually once a year, when it is on, 'offers something out-of-the-ordinary and different from daily routine' (163). The themed special section focused on the plight of refugees established the film festival strongly as a "utopian counter-space to the everyday, a heterotopia" for the audiences (163). It was positioned as an antidote to the refugee crisis. When speaking about the holding place, or home, Winnicott debates two terms - to cure and to care. Both terms come from the same root - Latin "curare" - and the presence of both in our vocabulary demonstrates an evolution of care and its increasing medicalization which for some led to curing becoming separate from caring. Winnicott was an advocate of the two happening in conjunction when it comes to patients. The dyad of care and cure resonates very strongly in the context of film festival curatorship generally and the One World in particular - whereby we can see film curating as a gesture of care and empathy towards the plight of the refugees, and an attempt to cure the audience damaged perhaps or negatively affected by the aggressive anti-refugee rhetoric coming from some European politicians and TV screens. Curating was a form of therapy for both the curators who put together the programme and the audience who committed themselves to watching it. In the act of watching the programme the audience is in the process of creating a new holding environment of a home, a kind of a real-world temporary utopia, made possible by the film festival. Importantly, Winnicott makes us aware that the existence of cultural experiences and our enjoyment of them is an important foundation and in the adult life a conduit towards health. Assuming that the audience is struggling with something very negative in their lives (like moral and ethical pressures around the refugee crisis) the festival programming becomes a conduit towards restoration and health by offering an alternative and different view of the refugee experience, and a more positive way of relating to them. The festival allows for different points of entry into the refugee's experience and therefore different ways of identifying with the refugee's position and point of view.

The idea of the holding environment is a liminal one in that it separates the world of the film festival from the outside reality but it is also firmly part of that reality and deeply implicated in it. This raises an important question of how the frame of the films which were screened at the festival is a separation from the outside reality and also part of it. As I have already mentioned the festival has screenings in Prague, a number of other Czech cities, and also in Brussels. Therefore the institutional frame of the festival is Czech and Belgian, both local and capital based, as well as European by the

virtue of the programme being shown in the capital of the European Union. These varied contexts of the festival allow us to consider the festival programme as belonging to the liminal space which is Czech national and also European and transnational. It is important to point out a paradox regarding the issue of the refugee crisis being part of the reality of the Czech audiences. None of the films deals in any way with the refugee crisis in the Czech Republic and none of the films is made by Central or Eastern European film-makers. In this sense the films invited the spectators to imagine, extrapolating from the stories, images and sounds, of the films how their home, the Czech Republic, might be transformed by the refugees. The programmed films thus created an imaginary home in the context of the holding space of the festival. There was an opportunity to think and to explore the possibility of a different shared European home.

This programme and the films could be also seen differently. Namely, the same Czech audience is also an audience of the citizens of the EU. By the virtue of that fact whatever happens in any member states of the European Union have an indirect, rippling or even a direct effect on people living in other member states. This is most aptly illustrated how in regard to the refugee crisis the EU member states have been unable to create adequate coping mechanisms acceptable to all member states which are differently impacted by the influx of the refugees. The film festival programme illustrated how the European Union is already changing and evolving towards the idea of this new shared home, and how it challenges the Europeans in terms of the core values of human rights they claim to uphold as the moral foundation of the Union. The issues of a specific national versus European identity, stemming from the existence of the EU, are difficult ones and it is not a place to consider them in any depth. It is enough to mention that there are different notions of home the film festival postulates. They are played out on different planes of the audience's consciousness, which might be overlapping in some ways. The sense of being Czech co-exists with the reality of also being European – in both civic and cultural terms. The ways in which programming affects the audiences can be illustrated through our analysis of Tascòn's concept of the humanitarian gaze into the migrant one and the establishment of the festive migrant chronotope which defines the festival such as the One World.

### **“Humanitarian gaze”**

Tascòn argues that the humanitarian gaze ‘is organized by a relationship of unequal power premised on humanitarianism’ where some are ‘victims and others as aiding them’ (Tascòn 2015, 7). But the humanitarian gaze, which is established and operates in the context of film festivals also carries seeds of its own destruction. It is when the humanitarian gaze is undone that the migrant gaze emerges. Essentially, it is a process of offering the migrant an agency, and the voice, which they don't otherwise

have. The kernels of the migrant gaze can be found either in the programming choices which include the films themselves OR in the film festival event itself especially the reaction of the public to the screenings which are moments of imagined (in the case of programming) or real (in the case of Q&As) dialogue around issues involving refugees.

The challenge to the humanitarian gaze at film festivals is directly related to how the spectators are positioned in relation to the narratives of films they get to watch. Tascòn calls it 'the looking out-looking in dichotomy' (11). Looking out is exercised broadly speaking in the case where the programmed films conform to the category of the human rights films and thus depict peoples and situations, which don't belong to the audiences' world. The looking in refers to films where the film festival takes place and the human rights situation there (11). Whether looking in or looking out the audiences may be encouraged to embrace one of the two attitudes towards the plights of the individuals depicted on screen. Tascòn defines these attitudes as either solidarity or weakness (11). Solidarity means that 'the stories portray strength and agency in carrying out solutions as the people living the problems see them' (11). Weakness means that 'the people are shown as overwhelmed by their problems, thereby triggering a helping relationship entirely bound by viewers' ability to write themselves onto the people and their problems' (11). The migrant crisis of 2015 meant that any "looking out" the audiences may have been engaging during the earlier editions of the One World Film Festival had to be urgently made into "looking in" as the migrants were crossing into Europe bringing with them their stories and intermingling them with those of the European (often unwilling) hosts. The refugee crisis was a domestic human rights issue in Europe and not just a remote problem happening somewhere else in the world.

The programming choices of the One World Film Festival were questioning the framework of human rights which underpinned the notion of the humanitarian gaze, and that they were doing it from the position of what Tascòn describes as weakness. In the films screened at this festival the refugees were by and large portrayed as overwhelmed by their problems, isolated and in need of help and assistance. Yet as the humanitarian gaze unravelled the migrant gaze, which belonged to the migrants themselves emerged. The migrants also gained voice through a more individualized representation of their stories on screen were the most immediate manifestation of the filmic aesthetic excess, which overhauled the humanitarian gaze. It also meant that another relationship emerged in the "looking in" taxonomy proposed by Tascòn – that of strength or dignity. This individualized and most importantly, dignified, migrant gaze (and voice) was also creating a very different image of the migrants from that familiar from the TV screens where they were shown as a silent moving and anonymous mass.

This emergent migrant gaze and voice only makes sense as foundations of the migrant festive chronotope if we understand better the notion of home the festival implies. In other words, the migrant

gaze manifests itself in relation to home – as it is established by the festival programming impacting the audiences and as it is represented on screen lived by the migrants in their everyday existence in Europe.

The migrant festive chronotope was established through construing a relationship of care between the film festival audiences and the migrants represented on the film festival screen. The female workers in the refugee centres usually provided points of identification for the film festival audiences.

## The programme

The 2016 programme of the thematic section called “Looking for Home”, consisted of 11 films including *A Walnut Tree*, *Detained*, *The Crossing*, *My Jihad*, *Fragility*, *Café Waldluft*, *Amal*, *The Longest Run*, *Every Face Has a Name*, *The Long Distance* and *I am Dublin*.<sup>5</sup> The central idea of home signalled in the festival’s opening statement is associated with a detention centre, a prison, or some kind of a temporary accommodation in most of the films. I will focus on a selection of the films from the programme which most directly deal with the notion of home and thus are most closely related to the refugee crisis which engulfed Europe in 2015. The films which present home in Europe as an institution are the Swedish films: *Detained* and *I am Dublin*; German films, *Café Waldluft* and *Amal*; and the Greek one, *The Longest Run*.

In Winnicott’s terms mother and infant are two central figures who allow for the holding environment to be established and maintained. The absence of the mother figure or her irresponsiveness to the needs of the infant creates a situation whereby the holding environment is upset. In Winnicott’s theory the notion of holding environment permeates most of human relations and impacts our views of community and society – the social system – we are part of. Firstly then we need to look at the nature of the homes where the refugees are housed as they are all dysfunctional in one way or another. The representations of the detention centres in Sweden and in Greece bring out a

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<sup>5</sup> [A Walnut Tree](#) (Dir. Ammar Aziz, 2015) [Pakistan: refugee camps]  
[Detained](#) (Dir. Anna Persson, Shaon Chakraborty, 2015) [Sweden: detention centre]  
[The Crossing](#) (Dir. George Kurian, 2015) [journey from Syria, settling in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands]  
[My Jihad](#) (Dir. Mark De Visscher, 2015) [Belgium]  
[Fragility](#) (Dir. Ahang Bashi, 2015) [Sweden]  
[Café Waldluft](#) (Dir. Matthias Koßmehl, 2015) [Germany: refugee centre]  
[Amal](#) (Dir. Caroline Reucker, 2015) [Germany]  
[The Longest Run](#) (Dir. Marianna Economou, 2015) [Greece: detention centre]  
[Every Face Has A Name](#) (Dir. Magnus Gertten, 2015) [Germany]  
[The Long Distance](#) (Dir. Daniel Andreas Sager, 2015) [Africa]  
[I am Dublin](#) (Dir. Ahmed Abdullahi, David Aronowitsch, Sharmarke Binyusuf, Anna Persson, 2015) [Sweden: Detention centre]

notion of an institutionalized form of home where the refugees are the charges of the state. The relationship between the two is fenced off by bureaucracy, red-tape and multiple limitations imposed upon the refugees who are treated as de facto prisoners. The ultimate fate of the migrants is sealed off with a court order which decides whether they are granted asylum, are to be further detained or are to be put on a plane back to their country of origins.

What strikes is a limited contact that the detainees have with the outside world. They are not being in any way integrated within the society, rather they are isolated from it. Emotionally they are more connected to their home country and relatives and friends there by the way of watching YouTube videos of ongoing bombings and destruction in their home towns, and being in regular contact by phone or Skype. Home which the refugees experience in these detention centres is very dispiriting with the migrants often being treated in an inhumane manner. In *Detained* they are referred to by a number and any bonding between them and staff is discouraged. The material conditions in the detention centre are good in Sweden but not in Greece shown in *The Longest Run* where the quality of housing in particular seems to be substandard. The representation of the Swedish bureaucracy is highly critical (*Detained*) while the Greek one seems to be by and large indifferent to what is happening to the refugees. The reason is that the officials in the detention centres are simply overwhelmed by the scale of the task they face and themselves are shown as an anonymous and indifferent face of the Greek state (and of the EU as well) (*The Longest Run*).

The home the migrants find in Germany is represented very differently. *Café Waldluft* is a poignant story of 35 refugees housed in the Bavarian guesthouse. They are made to feel to be part of the German family and they also manage to form a community among themselves cooking food from their respective countries and sharing their cultures thus learning about each other. It is not only the journey in discovering and learning what German culture is about but also about learning about each other as their backgrounds are very diverse. This situation offers an insight into what the future of Germany might be in terms of diversity of cultures. The film also breaks down a stereotype of refugees as a homogenous mass and focuses on them as individuals.

At the same time both in *Café Waldluft* and in *Amal*, a story of a Syrian family which settled permanently in Germany, we see how the migrants struggle with the German language, adopt diverse strategies to show themselves as “integrated” into the German society even though they are not, and most alarmingly how they engage in self-censorship when interviewed on camera as they restrain from any criticism of Germany and Germans. These coping strategies in turn signal how difficult and potentially flawed any integration in Germany actually is when it comes to the German public and the refugees. *Café Waldluft* thus becomes a utopia set in the Bavarian Alps engulfed by scepticism if not open hostility on the part of the local residents.

*Café Waldluft* also depicts another important element which can be found in some other films – the relationship between the refugees and women – who care for them in different ways. Sometimes the female carers are themselves refugees as is the case with the cook in *Café Waldluft* who came from the former GDR immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In most of the cases the female carers are the refugees' best bet for connecting with their new European home. Once the women are involved as caretakers their interactions with the refugees open new ways of contact and communication which is illustrated in *Café Waldluft* through the interactions between a small boy who came to Germany as a refugee and the German owner of the guesthouse. In *Detained* two female social workers are shown broking the rules of the detention centre by organizing parties and BBQs for the residents. They manage to establish a bond with the detainees and a degree of intimacy which leads to quite frank conversations and exchanges. None of this closeness is supported by those in charge of the refugee centre which becomes a further critique of the immigration authorities in Sweden who lack empathy and want to restrain natural human responses on the part of the social workers and the refugees.

## **Conclusion**

This article began with a juxtaposition of the refugee related imagery which dominated TV news channels in 2015 and a different kind of images offered by the human rights and documentary film festivals. I would like to conclude with a reflection on the process of researching the topic of this article. It is the difficulties of this research which made me realize how fragile and unstable the migrant gaze ultimately is and how short-lived the impact of the migrant festive chronotope is.

Film festivals are events bounded by the constraints of time and space. This means that the audiences for any film festival no matter how well-meaning or predisposed are very small in relation to the broader public who doesn't attend the festival. For this reason, ultimately, the impact of the film festival is limited – especially when it comes to transforming the media dominant regime of images and representations. Furthermore, I found it was impossible to reconstruct any Q&As or discussion panels from the time of the festival which Tascòn argues are crucial for understanding the activist function of this type of festivals. That means that there is no trace of the ways in which watching these documentaries impacted the audiences in their views. Also, it was very difficult to trace the films themselves. The majority hasn't had a life beyond the film festivals and I only managed to see them by obtaining video links from directors and production companies under the caveat I will not screen them in any public forum which obviously greatly reduces any change these films could bring.

But in order to end up on a more positive note here is a more hopeful example. One of the films which I felt was unique, *Café Waldluft*, was featured on Al Jazeera and was available on their website

for quite a long time to view for free. This is the only example I found of the festival films and TV images sharing the media space and the audiences and thus potentially providing alternative views in regard to the refugee crisis. Unfortunately, the film's subtitled version is no longer available on Al-Jazeera. The film was released on a DVD in Germany without English subtitles.

It is puzzling that Central Europe was the only part of Europe where film festivals were so responsive to the refugee crisis. These are parts of Europe where debates about the refugees were very intense from the start but also the parts of Europe with least stable borders, very fractured histories and dramatic political experiences. As in the past so nowadays what it means to be European is being redefined in these historically most troubled borderlands of Europe and yet again this is where the imaginary and moral not just physical borders of Europe are being redrawn. We do not yet know to what effect. What we know is that this reconfiguration of the moral terrain is enabled by the tradition of human rights which has its roots in the Czechoslovak dissident past under socialism and which nowadays impacts all parts of the European Union. This time 'the spectre is haunting' not just Eastern but also Western Europe. It is the spectre of human rights which may be able to transform the situation of the migrants arriving in the European Union if the Europeans remain faithful to their true values and less concerned about the immediate political gain.

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